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# Dissertation Review

## Introduction

I chose to select dissertations highlighting Wikis, blogs, and other Web 2.0 tools. My interest is in finding new ways to motivate students as they explore current technologies. Schools need to incorporate regular use of technology tools so that students can continue to develop effective technology literacy skills. Our world is changing and education needs to change with it. Just as advanced math exposes students to skills most will never need outside of the academic world, technology needs to be considered in a similar light. Although the technology will change as students advance to new grades, the critical thinking skills needed to understand, use, and master technology need to be developed. Our world is becoming a more collaborative one. Our students need to construct knowledge with an authentic team and audience. Wikis, blogs, and Web 2.0 tools provide opportunities to develop critical thinking skills within a collaborative atmosphere.

## Dissertation 1

Shifflet, R.. The instructional use of blogs and wikis for K--12 students. Ed.D. dissertation, Illinois State University, United States -- Illinois. Retrieved May 24, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3335621).

<http://proquest.umi.com.library.usca.edu:2048/pqdweb?did=1619393581&sid=1&Fmt=2&clientId=67505&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

## Summary

The author, a technology coordinator of a school system, chose to do a study to learn how eight K-12 teachers used wikis and blogs in their classrooms. Shifflet was concerned that student writing needs to improve and decided create a study to see if writing skills would improve with students using blogs and wikis. Some of the wikis were password protected, only available to the students, parents, and teachers. Other wikis were public. All of the teachers chose to use wikis and blogs to provide an authentic audience for their students’ writing. The participants believed that students learned from each other by having an authentic audience. Six out of eight of the teacher participants claimed that student blogs were more motivating for student learning. The two teachers who did not select motivation, said that either the students’ writing improved or the students performed better.

One of the purposes of having an authentic audience was to allow audience interactions with the writers. Higher student motivation was experienced by students’ who wrote on public wikis. Blogs allow users and audiences to make comments. Receiving feedback about their writing, created a more engaging experience for students.

## Review

The researcher claims that using blogs and wikis motivate learners. Technology changes quickly and what is available today may not be available tomorrow. Shifflet does an excellent job writing this easy to read article, full of useful information. Cse studies are interesting to read, highlighting the individual participants. The author shows varied ways that teachers used blogs and wikis in the classroom. Although they may have had different purposes for creating a blog, in the end, they resulted in more motivated learners. Most students enjoyed having an audience instead of writing in journals. The author shows the numerous reasons for teachers using wikis and blogs. Although the teachers may not be in 100% of agreement on the specific effects on students, all teachers report a variety of positive results on student learning, achievement, and motivation.

## Dissertation 2

Kim, N.. Scaffolding critical thinking in wikibook creation as a learning task. Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, United States -- Indiana. Retrieved May 24, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3380093).

<http://proquest.umi.com.library.usca.edu:2048/pqdweb?index=12&did=1921559011&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=2&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1274745505&clientId=67505>

## Summary

This study compares how the amount of scaffolding affects how well students were able to use their critical thinking skills to create and use wikibooks. Two different approaches were used in analyzing the success of students creating wikibook projects. The same instructors were used in each approach. One group of students received guides and used wikis before they were required to create one. The participants were gradually exposed to increasingly more difficult steps involving the use and creation of wikis. The second group of students didn’t have these experiences before they were required to create a wiki. Participants in this group went straight into the wiki project.

The research shows that the students who were provided more scaffolding during the project produced more professional work. This implies that learners were able to focus on the quality of the work instead of the frustration of navigating through the wiki were able to create a better product because they didn’t need to address wiki problems. Their critical thinking skills were able to focus more on the content of the product as opposed to the tool to create the product.

## Review

This is an interesting dissertation for me partly because of what we are doing in our small group project. Personally, I have been using wikis with my students this year and have had some success. There are many other opportunities for creating and using wikis with students, teachers, and peers. Because of my background in gifted education, I am interested in developing critical thinking skills. In my present position as technology specialist, I am conscious of better techniques to help students develop collaborative web 2.0 skills and products. This research is well written and helps me understand the importance of providing assistance to students as they engage in new technology challenges. In my own teaching, I will be more aware of the need to provide help as learners use these new tools. This research shows that students will develop higher level products if learners are given assistance along the way.

## Dissertation 3

Allen, G.. Practicing teachers and Web 2.0 technologies: Possibilities for transformative learning. Ed.D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, United States -- New York. Retrieved May 24, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text.(Publication No. AAT 3327101).

<http://proquest.umi.com.library.usca.edu:2048/pqdweb?index=24&did=1601499661&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=2&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1274746068&clientId=67505>

## Summary

The author did an action research study involving five teachers who used wikis, blogs, and podcasting to enhance learning not only for their students but for themselves. The study shows a transformation of the teachers as they changed not only the way they developed student learning opportunities with more wikis, blogging, and podcasts, but the teachers used these same tools to become contributors. In the classroom, the teachers’ students used more authentic learning. Students were more engaged in learning and experienced higher achievement levels.

Similarly, teachers became involved in blogs, podcasts, and wikis to become more contributors to their professional world. They shared their expertise with other educators through blogs, podcasts, and wikis. This proved to be a supportive tool for teachers, who sometimes experience isolation from non-technology-savvy peers at their schools. Having the online learning support provided opportunities for staff development that were not available at their schools. This facilitated personal growth, developed confidence, and led to their transformation. The individuals who were most involved with blogging and podcasts were the ones who underwent the furthest transformation.

## Review

In this well written publication, Allen does a thorough job in sharing information about this research. The review of literature is fifty pages in itself. Each section of the dissertation is well organized and filled with details. It is interesting to think about this “transformation.” I suppose, a transformation has happened to us, too, in this class, as we learn more and use more technology tools. We start using technology in one setting and then become involved in using it both personally and with our students. If teachers are passionate about what they do, then it is easy for our students to become passionate, too. It is interesting to see some research about how a teacher can be trying to do something for their students and end up developing leadership skills, becoming part of a community of learners.